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ABSTRACT

Oakton Community College is organized into four learning clusters, each comprising a group small enough to maintain "recognizability" and a sense of belonging. Each cluster has approximately 600 FTE students, 30 full-time faculty members, one learning resource faculty member, three counselors, and its own dean. The first of these reports, "A Minority Report on Academic Structure in the Community College" by the President of Oakton, details the administrative structure of these clusters and compares it in terms of costs to taxpayers and advantages to students and faculty with the traditional department or division structure found at most other colleges. The second report, "A Cluster College Grows Up" by a learning cluster dean, presents a five-year history of the college and its dedication to experimentation and the cluster concept. (DC)

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OAKTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE PAPERS ON THE CLUSTER CONCEPT

A Minority Report on Academic Structure in the Community College

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A Cluster College Grows Up

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OAKTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE
Morton Grove, Illinois

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A MINORITY REPORT

ON ACADEMIC STRUCTURE

IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

by William A. Koehnline
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Statistics reported recently indicate that community colleges, in general, are organized on either a departmental or a divisional basis.[1] Oakton Community College has operated for four years and a half without fitting that generalization. While the relative success of Oakton's internal structure as compared with that of a traditional structure has not been measured on any objective scale, those who have been associated with the non-departmental form of organization at Oakton are convinced, for the most part, that the learning clusters, as we call our nearest comparable units, do more for faculty, and for students, than either traditional departments or the increasingly common superdepartments or divisions commonly do.

Learning Clusters Defined

The unit of faculty-student grouping at Oakton Community College is called a Learning Cluster. Its appointed leader is a Dean. In a college of 4300

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[1] John Lombardi, "The Community College Departmental Structure, Directions for the Future," Community College Review, Summer, 1974, pp. 33-40.

students, Oakton has four learning clusters. On a full-time equivalent basis, current enrollment is 2400, or six hundred FTE per cluster. Each cluster has about thirty full-time faculty, representing a wide range of disciplines.

The basis for assignment of most faculty and students to a cluster is not homogeneity but variety and balance. A particular cluster will have either one full-time business instructor, or none (all have at least one part-time instructor); from three to five communications instructors; one foreign language instructor; from one to three instructors in humanities; one member of the learning resources faculty; from three to six mathematics and science faculty; either one physical education teacher, or none (there are no part-time physical education teachers, although there are part-time coaches); from two to four social science faculty members; three student development faculty members (called "counselors" elsewhere, but see below for a distinction); and from five to eleven full-time vocational-technical faculty members. Students in the cluster are in proportion to faculty.

Within the academic disciplines each learning cluster constitutes a small non-departmentalized "inner college" resembling in some respects and contrasted in others with the colleges of the traditional British universities, and other institutions built on the same model. In other words, what the clusters have as a unifying principle, so far as the story has gone, is a group of persons small enough to maintain "recognizability," a characteristic that is lost not only in large universities but in many community colleges

and high schools as well. It is this recognizability of faculty and students by each other that is one of the treasured characteristics of small and "special" colleges. At Oakton, an open-door college with an element of short-term enrollment as well as a more stable longer-term enrollment, a relatively high level of face-to-face recognition of large numbers of peers and "opposites" (teachers by students, students by teachers) is maintained.

At least three elements of the faculty within each of the several clusters merit further explanation. These are the learning resource faculty, the student development faculty, and the vocational-technical faculty. Each of these groups is commonly segregated from other faculty elements, in traditional departmental structures and, to some degree, in divisional structures as well.

Learning resource faculty report to and receive specialized supervision from a single ranking administrator, the Director of Learning Resources, who is in some respects a counterpart of the deans of learning clusters. Management and administrative textbooks would assign sole supervisory responsibility to the director. Oakton has chosen a different path. Each of the four subordinate administrators is assigned to one of the four learning clusters, and is encouraged to develop a loyalty and full membership rights and privileges in that cluster. Although his services to students are college-wide, his identity group is dual. He is both a member of the LRC faculty, reporting to the Director, and cluster faculty, reporting to a dean. In evaluating his performance, the dean and director must confer and agree. This presents some difficulties,

but after two variations on this form of reporting structure, the Oakton administration is convinced that we have found a workable and advantageous pattern, at least for the immediate future.

Student development faculty, twelve in all, report to the Vice President for Student Development for specialized supervision and college-wide coordination of their collegial functions. They are members of their respective clusters, similar in that respect to the LRC faculty, and are supervised in their capacity as teaching faculty by the deans. Incidentally, all of them do teach. The course they commonly teach is the Human Potential Seminar, a semester-long small-group counseling experience, on which several variations for special constituencies already exist. Human potential seminars paired with other courses in the form of tandems (a term to be explained below) constitute a special form of faculty-student interaction by student development faculty and other academic or occupational faculty. There is no single counseling center at Oakton. Where the cluster has its offices, there are the offices of that cluster's student development faculty. There, as well as in the lounges, classrooms, and corridors, is where the counseling is done.

Finally, within each cluster there are vocational-technical faculty. All of the faculty for each vo-tech program are in a single cluster, for practical reasons to be explained below, but not all the vo-tech programs within a larger classification are assigned to a single cluster. For example, the data processing faculty will all be found in a single cluster, but that cluster will not also include all other business related technologies (accounting,

hotel/motel management, insurance, marketing, secretarial science, etc.). Similarly, one cluster will include all faculty in practical nursing, but the same cluster will not also include other health technologies (MLT, MRT, PTA, RT). There will be no single public service technology cluster, no single engineering tech cluster, no ag/biological tech cluster. This avoidance of departmentalizing isn't motivated by eccentricity or perversity. In Oakton's philosophical framework, it makes sense.

Each vo-tech program has a coordinator, that, a teacher who has the additional assignment of planning, promotion, and paperwork for that curriculum. The coordinator needs to work closely with the one or two other faculty members in the typical vo-tech program (more in practical nursing, fewer in architectural technology, etc.). In a few instances, coordinators may "double," that is, have responsibility for more than one curriculum. In those instances it is desirable for all of the faculty and all of the students associated with those two programs to be assigned to the same cluster. In no instance, however, does a single coordinator have responsibility for all of the programs in any category -- business, health, public service, engineering, or ag/applied biology. Therefore no practical advantage or disadvantage other than the illusion of logical neatness and consistency results from grouping whole categories within single clusters. In fact, within Oakton's framework, an actual loss of consistency would occur.

Student-Oriented Values in the Learning Clusters

The ultimate value of any academic structure in such a student-oriented institution as the community college is value to the student. At Oakton we believe there are both cognitive values and social-affective values for the average student resulting from the existence of learning clusters. For the student in lite adolescence or early adulthood--and this age group still represents the majority in a student body ranging from sixteen to the sixties--the crisis of developing identity is an existentive reality. This student is still finding himself/herself. The mere membership in the freshman class of a college or university provides no effective means of identifying or achieving any adequate sense of belonging.[4] The usual departmental structure offers little in this regard since there are too many majors to gain any sort of individual visibility or cohesion, and most students do not really start their major in earnest until late in their sophomore year, at the earliest.

As we all know, late adolescents and young adults are not only undergoing cognitive growth during this period. They are developing character and personality, socially and emotionally. The learning cluster offers the possibility for the student to relate to peers and to faculty and staff in a more intimate way, more suited to meeting their individual growth needs.

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[4]For suggesting the inclusion of this centrally important idea and for providing some of the language in which it is expressed, the author wishes to thank Dr. Leroy A. Wauck, Professor of Psychology, Loyola University of Chicago.

Oakton still has some distance to go in fully exploiting the affective values of the clusters for students. Some unique social and cultural events for individual clusters, individual orientation programs, and individual lounge areas on the interim campus have been established, but the clusters have not acquired meaningful names. Great potential for growth continues to exist in this area, and it will be increasingly realized both on the interim campus and, four years from now, on the permanent campus.

A second valuable asset of the system of learning clusters, this time in the cognitive realm, is the concrete demonstration of the oneness of all knowledge. The departmental system fosters the misconception that knowledge is "really" compartmentalized. The department impresses compartmentalization both on the student and on the faculty. In order for teacher-scholars to learn to communicate with each other, they must be in some sort of proximity to one another. They must meet and discuss.

The arrangement of learning clusters enhances the possibility that college teachers will encounter one another in mutual exchange of ideas, providing the opportunity for them--and thus for their students, too--to see the links that exist among all the parts of man's knowledge and skill, and place the focus of their activities on the development of the student rather than purely on the development of their discipline.

This integration of human knowledge, the psychological desirability of providing

for a structure which will be in greater harmony with human growth and development, and the administrative advantages discussed elsewhere are all important reasons for supporting the learning cluster concept. They are ultimately more important than financial savings, but they are further supported by the argument for economy.

Value for the Taxpayer

Fewer administrators and fewer hours of released time for academic administrative purposes mean lower costs. The saving in having five units instead of six is not one-sixth of the erstwhile total, but it is substantial. All known departments and divisions are subject to considerable variation in size, complexity, and span of control, because of the vagaries of enrollment patterns, shifting institutional priorities, etc. That means that some departments will always be significantly larger or smaller than other departments, and normally the smaller departments will operate at higher costs.

The learning clusters can be kept abreast of each other by controlled growth and, if necessary, by lateral transfer. By this means the costs will be kept relatively uniform and relatively low. What is good for the student and teacher is good for the taxpayer as well!

Some Further Comparisons with Departments and Divisions

The present writer once co-authored an article in praise of the superiority of divisions over departments, and particularly in praise of the importance of the

division chairman. Having spent eight years in that position, more or less, he admits to what was then a prejudice. That article described the process of creating divisions, the first step being "an analysis of the curriculum into a minimum number of administrative units, each of a manageable size" and the second "a definition of units in order to assure logical coherence."[2] A serious attempt to do just that in two real and operational community colleges, as well as in a number of theoretical models, led to the conclusion that a truly logical coherence based on subject-matter analysis isn't achievable.

There are fundamental subject-matter distinctions within almost every traditional department. Any grouping of faculty based on putting together the equivalent of several traditional departments has within it some of the needs of dissolution. The trend of a departmental institution is toward the maximum number of departments that special interests can "sell" to central administration. For example, speech and journalism want to split off from English, and the theater and speech correction want to go their separate ways. That most prototypical of all departments, the Department of English, is itself the subject of major reservations by several of us who have spent the greater part of our lives within one such department or another. Some of these reservations have been wellexpressed by Dr. Harvey S. Irlen, first member

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[2]William A. Koehnline and Clyde E. Blocker, "The Division Chairman in the Community College," reprinted in The Academic Department on Division Chairman: A Complex Role, edited by James Brann and Thomas A. Emmet (Detroit, Michigan: Balamp Publishing, 1972) p. 147.

of Oakton's faculty and currently Dean, Learning Cluster Three.[3]

Dichotomies and even more complex splits characterize the fully departmentaliz college, and to almost as serious a degree, the fully divisionalized college. Some of the obvious splits are between full-time and part-time faculty, between "academic" and "technical" faculty, between counselors and teachers, between librarians and other professionals, etc. The splits are fossilized in the sharp lines drawn between departments (compartments) or divisions (units are divided rather than united, by definitions).

What do departments do? They cultivate their own gardens. They dig postholes. They go deeper into whatever it is that they collectively profess. They withdraw farther and farther from such students as are not departmentalized--that is, are not the community college equivalents of upper-division and graduate majors.

At meetings, departments make parochial and self-serving decisions. At best, these decisions are discipline serving or even "selected-student serving." At worst, they are merely self-preserving, self-protective, imperialistic, and competitive with the decisions made in other departments.

At division meetings, where the largest departments or proto-departments tend to dominate the discussion, the smaller departments tend to sulk

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[3]Harvey S. Irlen, "Responsive Academic Structures," ADE Bulletin, Bulletin of Association of Department of English, #33 - May, 1972, pp. 45-47.

silently or to object audibly to their arbitrarily imposed minority status. They yearn for an autonomous department of their own.

The competition among departments is usually not constructive and the cooperation among them is often strained. The necessity to compete is awkward and artificial, but often real. It is analogous to the ox competing with the lion, or the rabbit with the fox. Some departments have many more natural advantages than others.

There is a mild form of competition inherent in the cluster system, too, but it doesn't relate to courses, enrollments, budgets, or other aspects of the academic territorial imperative. Instead, it relates to excellence as measured by peers, to reputation as measured by students and former students, and hopefully to pride in the actual transactions of teaching and learning.

Oakton Community College is pleased to have avoided some of the pitfalls inherent in departmentalism and divisionalism. It hopes to discover and avoid the pitfalls inherent in clusterism. Lack of relevant structure is not, in our experience, one of those pitfalls.

Oakton also hopes to discover and exchange information with all of the "twenty or thirty" other colleges which have adopted some alternative to the traditional department. We expect to continue changing and we welcome the opportunity to change in ways that other colleges have found useful and productive.

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DRAFT

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A CLUSTER COLLEGE GROWS UP

Oakton Community College is five years old. In terms of birthdays, we are ready for kindergarten: and the feeling that it takes five years to prepare to learn is familiar to many of us in education. In terms of anniversaries, we are wooden: and we are equally familiar with the feeling that five years is too long--that we become rigid and inflexible, capable of being shaped from without but not from within. Reality, of course, lies somewhere in between. Five years need not be wasted, and need not lead to educational rigormortis. It is a good time for assessment--historical, pedagogical, and personal.

I.

Historically, then, the College opened its interim doors in the fall of 1970 to 800 students and 24 faculty. The students were young and middle-class; most of them claimed to be full-time baccalaureate transfer students; and they were united also by their perceptions of themselves as the leftovers of two strongly college-oriented high school districts. Oakton was a viable alternative, the only one open to them, to the draft or a full-time job. Today they are still predominantly middle-class. But there are over 4700 of them, their average age is over 26, 60 per cent of them are part-time, 30 per cent are enrolled in vocational-technical programs, and they are attending Oakton because it is cheap and convenient.

The faculty in 1970 seemed almost as young and middle-class as the student body. They were idealistic in direct proportion to their students' realism; they were energetic and genuinely excited at the prospect of teaching school the way it should be taught. They still seem that way (it's miraculous how none of us age), even though the idealism has turned querulous, the energy has been dissipated in committees and paperwork, the excitement has faded a little in the face of student demands for skills without frills, and the 24 have become 116.

Others have written at length about the kind of education the community college can and should deliver best. We cater, after all, to the student who can say, or whom we can help to say, "Here is precisely what I need. Give it to me as quickly and directly as possible, so I can leave here and do what I want to do." Since its inception, Oakton has acknowledged that education for a specific purpose is both valid and necessary. Vocational offerings multiply, and liberal arts courses increase to meet the needs of students who might want to major in particular areas at four-year institutions. But the College has never believed that the kind of education to be delivered ought to restrict the methods of delivery.

History and pedagogy fuse here. Since the second semester of the first year, Oakton has been formally organized as a cluster college. This organization--its educational and administrative benefits, flaws, and possibilities--is the focus of this assessment.

II.

The College is currently comprised of central support services and four interdisciplinary learning clusters, each headed by a Dean who reports to the Vice President for Curriculum and Instruction and the Vice President for Student Development. Approximately 30 full-time faculty and 35 part-time faculty report to each

Dean, in addition to clerical and paraprofessional support. Twelve hundred students, full- and part-time, are loosely assigned to each cluster--initially at random, then on the basis of instructors or vocational program.

It is important to emphasize the structural features of this organization at the outset, for the structure and the delivery of education are mutually reinforcing. The belief that knowledge is genuinely interdisciplinary, and that academic departments enforce artificial limits on subjects and a kind of dilettantism on faculty members who attempt to reach beyond them, means that instructors in each discipline are divided among the clusters. The exigencies of reporting to various state agencies, and of maintaining the cohesion necessary in programs of certification, mean that discrete vocational programs are located in individual clusters, but no one cluster is exclusively allied-health or business-related.

Similarly, the structure dictates that each learning cluster operate with a certain degree of autonomy--as a kind of mini-college. The faculties meet regularly to discuss teaching and learning, as well as inevitable business. The Deans, as members of the policy-recommending College Coordinating Council,* are expected to act as liaisons between the clusters and the central administration. The students, baccalaureate as well as vo-tech, part-time as well as full-time, are encouraged to identify themselves, as much as they care to or need to, with a particular cluster.

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*Chaired by the Vice President for Curriculum and Instruction, the College Coordinating Council recommends instructional policy to the President. Other members of the Council are the Vice President for Student Development, the Vice President for Business and Finance, the Assistant Vice President for Vocational Curricula, the Deans, the Director of the Learning Resource Center, and the Director of MONACEP (Maine-Oakton-Niles Adult and Continuing Education Program). The chairpersons of the faculty, student, and classified staff associations are ex officio members of the CCC.

But it is with the faculty that the cluster concept has its roots and its vitality--and its ultimate justification. This is not to deny our student-centeredness or our adherence to the student-development model as a means of ensuring the humaneness of the educational experience. It is, however, an attempt to acknowledge, once and for all, some realities of community-college education: our goal is to provide broad-based educational opportunities, responsive to changing community needs, as cheaply as possible; to fulfill our mandate for continuing education we must teach students the "how" of learning along with the "what;" and our students are highly transient while our faculties (especially in today's economy) tend to be stable. In other words, in order to be all things to all men, we must invest substantial time and energy in the very process of education--and this is a faculty activity, an administrative concern, in which students participate as beneficiaries.

Upon the faculty, then, rests the responsibility of creating an instructional milieu in which learning is as important as teaching, and skills are as important as facts. At Oakton, this perception of the instructor's role is not simply espoused as theory; it is practiced. The members of each cluster are teachers with various talents, backgrounds, and disciplines. They come together--quite literally as often as they are brought together--to share these attributes, and to apply them to the real problems of educating real students.

Slightly less than two-thirds of the faculty in each cluster teach baccalaureate-transfer courses in the liberal arts, general business, and general science curricula, as well as general studies courses (developmental and remedial). These courses, many of which are also required in the career programs, are intended to provide the student with the 60-64 credit hours equivalent to the freshman and sophomore years. Working by discipline across cluster lines, the baccalaureate

faculty are preparing minimal-mastery criteria for individual courses, supplying generalized budget input, developing additions to and modifications of the curriculum, and keeping current in fields from anthropology to zoology. Within the clusters, the baccalaureate faculty act as agents of change for the substantial members of students with whom they come into daily contact. Specific teaching methodologies are thrashed out here; special programs in response to specific needs are devised and articulated; budgeting is done by and for individual instructors; and the daily successes and failures of the classroom are discussed and evaluated.

One-third of the faculty teaches in vocational curricula ranging from agricultural marketing to secretarial science. Each cluster has its own career programs, headed by coordinators who, with modified teaching schedules, have quasi-administrative duties in areas like recruitment, scheduling, budgeting, and curriculum development. Through the Deans the career programs are linked administratively to the Assistant Vice President for Vocational Curricula, but they are otherwise fully integrated into the clusters, both physically and pedagogically. This means that students and coursework can be integrated as well: sections of anatomy and physiology or business communications can be taught for students in radiologic technology or business machine repair; composition and secretarial instructors can work together on a competency-based curriculum; the vo-tech student with a problem in math can be identified and helped immediately; and a humanities instructor can help to develop a new legal assistant program.

Three members of each cluster are counselors--student development faculty. They perform routine and personal counseling, teach psychology, consult with other faculty in matters of classroom dynamics, and are responsible, through the office

of the Vice President for Student Development, for such collegial areas as articulation, vocational counseling, and student activities. In the clusters the student development faculty serve as a necessary and valuable leavening. Their teaching schedule is limited, and their exposure to individual students is grueling; their academic training is conspicuously people-oriented. They are able, consequently, to bring to discussions of classroom methodology and management a concern for the student-as-person that is a valid complement to concerns for academic rigor and vocational training. By no means do they possess this concern exclusively, but they profess it consistently, even stridently, in an effort to keep humanistic teaching humane.

Finally, a member of the learning resource center faculty is attached to each cluster. These persons, with expertises in a variety of media, are full partners in the teaching-learning process; their specialized functions within the clusters are to make learning resources accessible to the faculty at large, and to coordinate available equipment and materials with faculty needs. Though they report to the Director of the Learning Resource Center, they are encouraged to act as cluster members within the limits of their available time.

The faculties of the clusters, as described above, have made their influence felt in three major areas: interdisciplinary coursework, instructional options, and evaluation for merit. It is our belief that the cluster system has contributed significantly to the development of these areas--that, with other structures, they would have been more difficult, if not impossible, to attain. We do not denigrate departments or divisions, or both, as evil or even inefficient. We feel, however, that they discourage communication, and that they tend to emphasize subject matter and teaching over knowledge and learning.

An interdisciplinary course is one in which the practitioners of more than one discipline address common or related subjects from the vantages of their respective fields. In other words, the sociology of literature is not taught by a sociologist who dabbles in literature. It is taught by a sociologist and a literary critic together, each bringing to a common subject his own insight, training, and experience.

At Oakton, the faculty has developed two kinds of interdisciplinary coursework. Team-taught sections combine the talents and personalities of two or more instructors in the teaching of a single course. An introductory humanities course, Modern Culture and the Arts, for instance, is taught by four instructors--one each in literature, art, drama, and music. A somewhat more flexible approach to the cooperation of disciplines is the so-called tandem course. Two courses in different fields are offered by two instructors in successive time periods to the same group of students. Subject matter, texts, lectures and discussions, tests and papers are coordinated; and the students get what is in effect a third course, greater than either of its components: American history and an introduction to fiction, or business math and business machines, or a human potential seminar and developmental reading.

Obviously, once the patterns have been established, they can be modified any number of ways. A tandem course can be entitled "1984" and taught by three instructors to include geography, environmental science, and sociology. A team-taught course entitled "The American Dream," relying heavily on feature films, can let students opt for credit in political science or humanities. The point is, of course, that these courses are devised within the clusters, in response to perceived student needs--not to mention demands--by colleagues who, in a more traditional setting, would never

even see each other, much less sit down and plan together.

Reasoning such as this leads inevitably to even broader possibilities: Can we devise a scheme in which the student can select, within logical limitations, not only the subjects he wishes to study, but also the mode of learning he wishes to employ in that study? The affirmative response to that question is manifested in a variety of ways, all designed to provide the student with instructional options that fit his style of learning and are pedagogically sound. Each semester, prior to registration, the College publishes a Directory of Courses and Sections in which full-time instructors describe in detail--objectives, classroom expectations, grading procedures, texts--each section of each course they are to teach. Regardless of cluster assignment, students are free to select the section that appeals to them most; and they understand that the descriptions serve as preliminary contracts between them and their instructors.

Additionally, a number of special and specialty programs have originated within the several clusters. The theory here is that four mini-colleges quadruple the opportunities for experimentation, at perhaps one-fourth the initial investment. Programs that prove successful become college- rather than cluster-sponsored. The Semester for Self-Directed Study and the Green Turnip Survival program enable students to earn up to 12 credit hours pursuing an interdisciplinary course of study that they design themselves. Women Returning to School and Gray Matters offer specialized opportunities for women and senior citizens to ease their entry or re-entry to college. Focus: Chicago and the American Studies program deal with the city, and with the nation at its bicentennial. Some of these programs offer seminars open to the community; some are accessible to students through the adult and continuing education program. Faculty in one cluster are responsible for the creation of an increasingly popular community-oriented student repertory company.

But innovation for the sake of innovating is a futile exercise. Since the fall of 1970 the Oakton faculty has supported the principle of merit evaluation on the theory that we need to know if what we are doing works. The evaluation procedure has become fairly elaborate over five years, but the basic belief remains that there is room for improvement in all of us, and that a combination of student, peer, administrative, and self-evaluation provides the best means of getting at how to improve.

Here again the clusters have been a remarkably effective vehicle for a sound idea. Each faculty member is evaluated throughout the academic year by his or her Dean. Simultaneously, members of the cluster are engaged in the kinds of ongoing discussion, experimentation, and problem-solving described on preceding pages. In this context participation is as important as a demonstrable success, and an experiment that fails nonetheless provides valuable information for one's colleagues. Everyone, including the Dean and the support staff, is involved in promoting instructional effectiveness, and everyone shares in the unavoidable disappointments. Evaluation is construed positively; it works for the student, for the teacher, for the school.

One pictures a cluster as both round and irregular--an image that seems to hold at Oakton. Though not the same, the clusters perform similarly. Established to promote interdisciplinary, student-centered education, with legitimate choices, accessible to the community, the clusters have given flesh and form to these otherwise abstract goals. On balance, their outcomes and their impetus are, full-circle, the same; and that, all in all, seems a remarkable achievement.

III.

Where does all this lead? One ought to conclude positively, yet candor demands some notes of warning. If the cluster system is a valid means of delivering education, it deserves to be replicated elsewhere--and not just at new institutions. This will be extremely difficult. Faculties may be receptive, students may be responsive, but departmental structures are ingrained and tenacious. For five years, the most chilling reaction has been, "It sounds nice, but it won't work here." If we become missionaries, and some of us already have, we just may need to be able to document that the cluster system works better; and we may not be able to do that without an investment of time and energy comparable to what has gone before.

More important, the cluster system may cease to work at Oakton. We have been accused of stacking the deck, of hiring only people who believe in what the institution is doing. This would seem to be the institution's prerogative, but anyone who has participated in employment interviews knows that it is impossible. Job applicants, by and large, say what they need to say; what they do when the contract is signed can be something quite different, and perhaps harmful.

I am often concerned that, at the age of five, we may have grown up and old. I commiserate with my colleagues who were in on the beginning, and who resent what they define as a loss of enthusiasm and commitment. I understand the lure and the safety of departments, step systems, regular office hours, and classrooms with closed doors.

But Oakton Community College allows its faculty to educate its students. This is hard to imitate, harder to defend, and certainly worth the effort of doing both. We have developed a structure that accommodates freedom and excitement, at no loss of quality or sequence. Our goal for future anniversaries is to refine this enterprise, to validate it, and to make it increasingly accessible to those who will benefit from it.